

## RTA Virtual Town Hall: Transit System Plan Questions & Answers

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On January 28, 2021, a Virtual Town Hall was held by the Regional Transportation Authority of Central Oklahoma (RTA) on Zoom, and it was also streamed to Facebook Live and posted as recordings to view on-demand. The questions and answers contained in this document were gathered during the virtual event and up until February 11, 2021. This document will be updated until February 11, 2021 with any other questions received. Please utilize the comment/question form [HERE](#), for the Transit System Plan, to submit any additional questions or comments to be included in forthcoming additions to this Q&A.

**Q: What is the best way to sell the RTA to the public who largely believe more money should be spent on fixing roads? Additionally, the traffic in OKC isn't too bad, so you can get most anywhere in 20 minutes. How do you sell the RTA auto a largely car-based city?**

A: RTA's role is to educate the public about the benefits of public transit, such as economic opportunity and planning for the region's future, and to facilitate what the member cities would like to see from a transit and mobility perspective.

Adding transit choices to the region's overall transportation systems will provide additional options for people to move around. It will also help make this region competitive economically, and it can help increase higher-paying jobs and economic growth in the future. Cars are still a primary vehicle in our regional mobility network and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

**Q: Is the RTA aware of efforts by the State of Kansas to expand Amtrak passenger rail service north of Oklahoma City, through Wichita, on the infrastructure that will be used by the RTA commuter train between to Edmond? How can I share information with the RTA? I believe these projects are mutually beneficial and applications for federal grants should be coordinated between the two and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.**

A: RTA is aware of the efforts and staying abreast of the process being undertaken.

**Q: Do corridors typically extend further past the main "destination" point? For example, a bit further south of the Norman core to capture those coming into Norman from the South?**

A: It is typical for station areas, particularly near the end of a line, to have large capture areas. We will be looking at solutions that help people who live farther away to access the regional transit system through solutions such a park-and-rides. These options will be explored in the next phases of the project.

**Q: Can rail service become "wheel" as well as "spoke" in design? I see the map gives rise to connecting the end of Tinker in a loop back southwest to South OKC and maybe further west to the airport. Is there extra Federal funding for commuter status rail service?**

A: It is possible to connect in-between corridors when warranted by growth and demand if the region warrants. This kind of "hub and spoke" transit system typically occurs in major metropolitan areas and likely would not be developed until after core commuter corridors are established.

There is potential federal funding available for high capacity transit service including commuter rail service. We intend to apply to the competitive federal program for transit through FTA. This will be examined as part of our next phase of planning work.

**Q: Did you consider bicycles as transportation type and a need for their own corridor?**

A: Connectivity is a priority in developing an expanded transit network. At this point, we do not know if a separate bicycle corridor will be included. This would involve many elements, including cost and right-of-way, that would have to be worked through. Ultimately, this is a decision for the RTA Board to guide.

**Q: Would Edmond need a train station?**

A: We expect that there will be need and demand for a station in Edmond. The 2015 Commuter Corridor Study contemplated stops in Edmond so we will be examining this further in the more detailed planning work after the Transit System Plan is in place.

**Q: What's a reasonable time frame for funding?**

A: The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will want to see that the RTA adopted a System Plan, or vision, that is part of the larger regional transportation plan in order to award federal funding in the future. We are expecting to have a draft Transit System Plan for the RTA Board to consider in April 2021. Assuming the Transit System Plan is adopted, we will move into the next phases of the project planning: Alternative Analysis, Environmental & Engineering, and Implementation. Based on the current schedule, we expect to complete the planning work by mid-2025. Once the planning work is completed, we can then apply for federal grant funds. As part of FTA's process, we expect to be notified of a federal grant within 3 years from submitting the application. There are many requirements to be eligible to participate in the federal program, including an approved source of local funds. All of this will be explored in the next phases of the project once the Transit System Plan is in place.

**Q: What cooperation have you received from the existing rail companies (BNSF or UP) as part of the planning process? (Assuming use of their existing rails may become necessary).**

A: We have had preliminary discussions with BNSF about potential access for a potential commuter rail operation. While BNSF has not made a commitment at this time, they engaged in a good faith dialogue and have been cooperative. Discussions are ongoing and will be continued in the next phases of the project.

**Q: Is it possible that some of these improvements might be able to be implemented quickly? We have three of the four major corridors already and the NW BRT is already in process.**

A: There are many considerations for the timing of implementation including corridor identification, mode choice, funding, and construction. All elements of the corridors will be examined in much more detail after the Transit System Plan is in place. Then, once the RTA Board and community solidify the plan for the identified corridors, we will be able to develop an implementation schedule and identify potential funding. We will examine all of this in the next phases of the project.

**Q: What is the difference between a regular bus system and a bus rapid transit system?**

A: The EMBARK system is a good example of a fixed route, or regular bus system. Primary consideration for the bus system is overall accessibility so routes cover a large area and are not necessarily corridor based. The stops are spaced close together to allow shorter walks to the bus stop. Bus stops are usually a bench or shelter only, and fares are paid on the bus. A bus rapid transit (BRT) service is designed to generally serve a specific corridor and provide faster trip times. The trip is faster because the stations are spaced farther apart (less stops), and the bus has more opportunities to avoid traditional traffic delays due to Traffic Signal Priority and, in some cases, dedicated lanes. BRT stops are identifiable stations with level boarding platforms, robust real time bus arrival information, and the ability to purchase bus passes at the platform .

**Q: How are projects of this scale typically financed? All Federal money, or some portion public and private funding?**

A: It is typical for transit authorities to utilize funding from state and federal grant programs, local funding sources such as sales tax, as well as utilize financing mechanisms including bond financing. More detailed potential costs and funding sources will be evaluated in the upcoming stages of planning work.

**Q: Will your plan be considering planned and proposed bike facilities? And how will bicycle parking be incorporated in future rail stations?**

A: Bicycle infrastructure will be a consideration in connecting corridors. We are too early in the process to know for sure but would expect all stations to have local pedestrian/cyclist connections, as well as bicycle storage systems at some or all stations. Connecting to existing trails would be a priority. Evaluating local priorities for associated bicycle infrastructure to connect to the higher capacity regional modes will be included in the upcoming stages of planning work.

**Q: I imagine the answer is yes, but are other systems in other states being reviewed? It seems like the system in and around Salt Lake City is a somewhat similar model.**

A: In 2017, RTA's predecessor, the RTA Task Force looked at six transit properties including Salt Lake City, Dallas, San Diego, Phoenix, Portland, and Detroit. We do see similarities between RTA and Salt Lake City and are looking to them for lessons learned regarding how their system developed.

**Q: What is the planning horizon?**

A: Planning for the new regional transit system is a multi-year effort. We are expecting to have a draft Transit System Plan for the RTA Board to consider in April 2021. Assuming the Transit System Plan is adopted, we will move into the next phases of the project: Alternative Analysis, Environmental & Engineering, and Implementation. In this more detailed planning work, we will outline the timeline for implementation, which will likely be in phases.

As part of our work, we will be working within ACOG's horizon year of 2045.

**Q: Is there a possibility these systems could be wind/solar powered?**

A: Yes, it is a possibility. We are planning for a transit system that is adaptable and flexible for years to come. As technology advances and alternatives become available, we expect to be in a position to take advantage of them.

**Q: Are you considering transit-oriented development with this plan?**

A: Not at this stage of the process, but definitely at later stages. During the Alternatives Analysis work, transit-oriented development and associated station area planning will be considered. Transit stations become more successful if they have compatible land uses surrounding them that create a vibrant setting and integrate with the community, and they can be significant economic development, accessibility, and equity generators.

**Q: What is the process for getting funding approved?**

A: The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will want to see that the RTA adopted a System Plan, or vision, that is part of the larger regional transportation plan in order to award federal funding in the future. We are expecting to have a draft Transit System Plan for the RTA Board to consider in April 2021. Assuming the Transit System Plan is adopted, we will move into the next phases of the project planning: Alternative Analysis, Environmental & Engineering, and Implementation. Currently, we expect to complete the planning work by mid-2025. Once the planning work is completed, we can then apply for federal grant funds. As part of FTA's process, we expect to be notified of a federal grant within 3 years from submitting the application. There are many requirements to be eligible to participate in the federal program including an approved source of local funds. All of this will be explored in the next phases of the project once the Transit System Plan is in place.

The current federal Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program is a competitive program that includes many requirements and milestones including a local financial commitment, project definition, schedule, cost estimates, and meeting all of the criteria set forth by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

**Q: Thank you for the presentation. I was a bit late to the meeting - so my apologies if this was addressed.**

**I moved to OKC from Washington, DC, where regional transit is something that I used to take for granted.**

**I think regional transit systems are vital to thriving cities, and would especially love to see ours grow to help people of less means. However, I think that new transit systems can bring negative externalities to communities as well (such as gentrifying poor communities). How does RTA plan to address the long-term negative consequences of regional transit? Thank you.**

A: There are many positives to a regional transit system, including accommodating future growth, providing economic opportunity and competitiveness, and giving people options to get to where they live, work, and play. RTA's intention is to plan a transportation network with our city partners and integrate new stations appropriately into our neighborhoods. Cities will have the opportunity to provide local strategies to mitigate potential gentrification where appropriate.

**Q: What would be the timeline from implementing until there is construction and completion?**

A: Construction and operation of the first regional transit improvements associated with this effort is at least five years out and depends on a lot of variables. The RTA Transit System Plan is a multi-year effort. We are expecting to have a draft Transit System Plan for the RTA Board to consider in April 2021. Assuming the Transit System Plan is

adopted, we will move into the next phases of the project: Alternative Analysis, Environmental & Engineering, and Implementation. In this more detailed planning work, we will outline the timeline for implementation, which will likely be in phases.

Construction will begin after funding has been secured at the federal and local level. The timeline from construction to operation will depend on multiple factors including selected mode choice and corresponding improvements necessary to the corridor.

**Q: Will people riding bicycles be a consideration? Specifically, will a rail system also include Rails with Trails alongside the rails to accommodate people riding bicycles. The New Mexico Rail Runner system in Santa Fe is an example of a Rails with Trails system.**

A: Evaluating local priorities for associated bicycle infrastructure to connect to the higher capacity regional modes will be included in the upcoming stages of planning work.

**Q: Is the RTA aware of efforts by the State of Kansas to expand Amtrak passenger rail service north of Oklahoma City through Wichita? Can the RTA partner with the state to apply for federal grants to improve chances of receiving FTA/FRA grants?**

A: RTA is aware of the efforts and staying abreast of the process being undertaken.

**Q: Once the construction is started how long would it take to complete one of these corridors?**

A: Construction and operation of the first regional transit improvements associated with this effort is at least five years out and depends on a lot of variables. Construction will begin after funding has been secured at the federal and local level as part of a multi-year process, with operations following construction.

**Q: Would there be any consideration in connecting to Tulsa even though its outside the RTA boundaries?**

A: The [Trust Agreement and Indenture](#) that establishes the RTA contemplates future expansion as new communities' request to be included within the RTA boundary. Certainly, if there is an interest of the community in Tulsa to join the RTA, there are mechanisms to allow for that to happen.

**Q: Years ago, in college at OU we used to ride bicycles from Norman to OKC and back via "Ten Mile Flats", which translates to Western Ave. Is there room for self-propelled travel options that don't overlap with automobiles?**

A: Connectivity is a priority in developing an expanded transit network. Evaluating local priorities for associated bicycle infrastructure to connect to the higher capacity regional modes will be included in the upcoming stages of planning work. This would involve



many elements, including cost and right-of-way, that would have to be worked through with local communities.

**Q: Are you planning on the north south Right of way of BNSF from south of Norman to north of Edmond. Many of the current road crossings are single tracks and represent current traffic delays. Is combined use on dual tracks a shared cost option with BNSF? Faster freight and public transit.**

A: If commuter rail is identified as the locally preferred alternative between Norman and Edmond, the subsequent phases of the study would examine the improvements required within the railroad right-of-way to accommodate commuter rail.

**Q: Could our system be as nice as SLCs?**

A: We are considering existing transit systems, such as Salt Lake City's, to develop a world-class transit system for the Central Oklahoma region.

**Q: Has the City of Guthrie considered joining the RTA?**

A: At this point in time, the City of Guthrie has not expressed an interest in joining the RTA.

**Q: Do we have an estimate on when we might start seeing construction when it comes to BRT?**

A: The EMBARK NW Corridor BRT Project is moving ahead. It runs along Classen Ave. from downtown to the NW Expressway terminating at NW Expressway and Meridian. It will be under construction in 2022 and open for service in 2023. The project has completed environmental requirements and 30% design.

For other future corridors, construction will begin after funding has been secured at the federal and local level. The timeline from construction to operation will depend on multiple factors including selected mode choice and corresponding improvements necessary to the corridor, but an additional BRT is likely several years out from construction and operation.

**Q: How long in advance of the next town hall will the plan to be discussed be available for review?**

A: We anticipate posting materials on draft concepts and highlights of the draft Plan on the RTA website in advance of the Town Hall. The public will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the full draft before the draft Transit System Plan is considered by the RTA Board in April. Be sure to sign up for updates from the RTA to stay informed!

**Q: What opportunities for further community engagement will be available? In addition to the March 24 town hall, will there be other opportunities to connect with smaller groups in the region, including smaller municipalities as well as business and neighborhood groups?**

A: We hope that this work starts now through our member cities and RTA outreach and that it continues through the upcoming phases of planning work. Our member cities and the community members who live in them are encouraged to share RTA updates and efforts and provide timely feedback so that we can collaborate. As we advance into the next phases of planning, we will continue to identify important stakeholders, community business groups, and neighborhood groups to engage with upcoming events. Be sure to sign up for updates from the RTA to stay informed!

**Q: I was thinking of how California funded their rail system-connecting commuter funded rail to long distance rail service. LA to San Francisco. Norman to Edmond commuter later connecting to Amtrak Newton KS to create a real regional network.**

A: RTA's focus is to provide transportation options within the Central Oklahoma region to expanded mobility and connecting where people live, work, and play via new transit services and other modes.

**Q: What is the typical spacing between stops for commuter rail?**

A: Generally, the typical spacing for stops for commuter rail is 5-8 miles, but it depends on several factors. We will explore relevant station spacing as part of the next phases of planning work.

**Q: Will buses someday have the capability of holding a light long enough to make left turns when needed, or make it through an intersection to improve on time performance?**

A: The technology for Traffic Signal Priority and Transit signal phasing exists today, is currently in use by the Oklahoma City Streetcar and is being integrated into the NW Corridor BRT. Additionally, through the MAPS 4 program, voters approved enough funding to add Traffic Signal Priority to approximately half of the intersections throughout the EMBARK fixed route bus network. Once implemented, all public transit modes in OKC will have the advantage of Traffic Signal Priority making the service more reliable and hopefully more competitive with the automobile.

**Q: What is BNSF's role in commuter rail, like OKC to Norman?**

A: If commuter rail is identified as the locally preferred alternative, the RTA would collaborate with BNSF for access within their corridor. In the event that access rights are granted, BNSF and RTA would enter into a long-term partnership of the service. This would be reviewed and examined in the next phases of planning work.



**Q: Clarification: Bicycles will not need a dedicated corridor, but the corridor, if shared with other transportation types, should have amenities, rules, or regulations to ensure they could be ridden safely.**

A: Acknowledged and agree

**Q: Any early thoughts or ideas on job creation? After construction, how many jobs could be expected to be maintained?**

A: Job creation and economic development benefits are definitely in the conversation at this early stage. More details about potential job creation and other economic benefits will be developed and evaluated in upcoming planning work.

**Q: I know you can't answer timing questions exactly....but can you give us some idea....it sounds like you are talking 10 to 20 years out....what can we realistically expect?**

A: Construction and operation of the first regional transit improvements associated with this effort is at least five years out and depends on a lot of variables. Based on the current schedule, we expect to complete the planning work by mid-2025. Once the planning work is completed, we can then apply for federal grant funds. As part of FTA's process, we expect to be notified of a federal grant within 3 years from submitting the application. There are many requirements to be eligible to participate in the federal program including an approved source of local funds. All of this will be explored in the next phases of planning work, once the Transit System Plan is in place.

**Q: Will bikes be welcome on light rail services? Amtrak Heartland Flyer used to have bike storage for day trips to bike trails.**

A: The RTA Board will establish a policy regarding whether to allow bikes on the RTA system. Bikes are currently welcome on EMBARK's fixed route bus service and OKC Streetcar. This will be further studied in the next phases of the project.

**Q: Seeing as this system will travel across municipal jurisdictions, how does the RTA plan to work with regional entities in the planning phase?**

A: The RTA is a regional independent governmental agency established in 2019, under the laws of the State of Oklahoma. City councils from each member city – Del City, Edmond, Midwest City, Moore, Norman, and Oklahoma City, created the regional Authority by resolution. The RTA is governed by a seven-member board of directors, with appointed officials from each member city. The RTA is responsible for developing, funding, constructing, implementing, operating and maintaining transportation projects located within the boundaries of the regional transportation district.

Due to this structure, our collaboration with each member city and between all member cities is built into all of our efforts. The RTA will also continue working with regional metropolitan planning organization (ACOG) to advance RTA initiatives.

**Q: Does the study consider "first and last mile"?**

A: The RTA will consider "first and last mile" options in the next phases of the project. First and last mile connections provide an opportunity to connect the regional network to homes, jobs, or activity centers.

**Q: Will weather safety be considered in terms of, say, tornado shelter areas at possible station locations?**

A: The specific details of the physical design for the stations will be considered in the next phases of the project. RTA will prioritize passenger safety as design advances.

**Q: How do railroads contribute financially to improvement projects? There used to be a fund government could tap into funded by the railroads themselves.**

A: Transit improvement projects are paid by the transit agency typically with federal, state, and local funds.

**Q: Is there a "sister city" that is comparable to our region that you are looking to for best practices or that is 15-25 years ahead of us in terms of implementation?**

A: In 2017, RTA's predecessor, the RTA Task Force looked at six transit properties including Salt Lake City, Dallas, San Diego, Phoenix, Portland, and Detroit. In particular, we see similarities between RTA and Salt Lake City and looking to them as how their system was developed.

We are considering existing transit systems, such as Salt Lake City, to develop our world-class transportation system for the region that meets the needs of our 6 city members and their communities.

**Q: Difference between commuter rail and light rail?**

A: Commuter rail trains are usually diesel powered and heavier so they can safely run in freight corridors commingled with freight operators such as the BNSF. They also operate at faster speeds (79mph) and go longer distances with stations spaced farther apart (5-8 miles). The train cars can carry quite a lot of people (500-700 seats).

Light rail on the other hand, goes slower (55 mph) and travels shorter distances with stations spaced about a mile apart. They usually have shorter trains and carry less people (50-100 seats per train car).

**Q: Is there a projected date for seeing transit taking passengers between OKC and other municipalities such as Mid-Del?**

A: There are many considerations for the timing of implementation including corridor identification, mode choice, funding, and construction. All elements of the corridors will be examined in much more detail after the Transit System Plan is in place. Then, once the RTA Board and community solidify the plan for the identified corridors, we will be able to develop an implementation schedule and identify potential funding. We will examine all of this in the next phases of the project.

**Q: Where does ODOT fit into this relationship with RTA? They seem to own/control right of ways in the state. Can the Turnpike Authority be connected in some way for expertise or as a possible funding source?**

A: The RTA is the implementing agency for regional transit in Central Oklahoma. ODOT is a state agency responsible for state-wide transportation. The RTA will work closely with ODOT as the projects advance.

**Q: What role does the State Legislature play in empowering local partners on commuter rail?**

A: The State Legislature has been very supportive of increasing transit services in the Central Oklahoma region as seen with the 2014 enabling legislation that led to the creation of the RTA. We look forward to continuing to partner with the State Legislature as the RTA advances expanding transit in the region.

**Q: Could these systems be powered by clean energy**

A: We are planning for a transit system to be adaptable and flexible for years to come. As technology advances and alternatives become available, we expect to be in a position to take advantage of them.

**Q: What is the end goal of a rail system? To connect the communities (just general people alternative travel) or connect entertainment areas (Arena-Bricktown/OU stadium/Edmond) or large employers (Tinker)/universities/downtown?**

A: The RTA Transit System Plan articulates a vision for future transit for the region. The Plan guides transportation policies, investments and projects for the RTA for the next 10-25 years.

**Q: Who will lead the community approval effort? Assuming it will take a lobbying/informational campaign.**

A: No decisions have been made at this point on how to manage the voter approval process.

**Q: What is the difference between light rail and commuter rail?**

A: Commuter rail trains are usually diesel powered and heavier so they can safely run in freight corridors commingled with freight operators such as the BNSF. They also operate at faster speeds (79mph) and go longer distances with stations spaced farther apart (5-8 miles). The train cars carry quite a lot of people (500-700 seats).

Light rail on the other hand, operates at around 55mph with stations spaced about a mile apart. Light rail typically runs in both a dedicated guideway or within city streets with corridors averaging around 15-20miles long. Light rail trains, while higher-capacity than buses, carry less people than commuter rail (50-100 seats per train car).

**Q: How has Covid affected your future designs and timeline?**

A: Despite COVID, the RTA has continued working virtually to progress the project. We look forward to resuming in-person meetings soon.

**Q: Will the planned transit services allow access for people with disabilities and mobility devices?**

A: Accessibility will be considered when developing the Transit System Plan and in the next phases of the project. This is an important consideration for the design phases of the project.

**Q: This transportation plan sounds very exciting! When I moved here 14 years ago from a state with an extensive state transportation system I couldn't believe the lack of public transportation that existed in this great state. Living in Moore offered only 3 modes of transportation; your own vehicle, your own bike, and your own feet. Even getting a taxi was an ordeal. In recent years Uber & Lyft have been added to the modes in this city. Will cities like Moore ever see modes like busses, trolleys, and/or trains? It looks like on presentation a line will go from Edmond to Norman. Is that line going down I-35? Would it even make stops in Moore or just pass thru it?**

A: The 2015 Commuter Corridor Study contemplated a stop in Moore as well as commuter rail running in the BNSF corridor. We will be examining this further in the more detailed planning work after the Transit System Plan is in place.

**Q: Is there a plan to subsidized fares for people with disabilities and low-income people?**

A: To date, the RTA Board has not had discussions about fare structure. This will be explored in the next phases of the project.